

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please replace all previous versions of the claims with the following listing:

1 – 6. (Cancelled)

7. (Previously Presented) A fuel return device for an internal combustion engine for recovering surplus fuel supplied to the internal combustion engine simultaneously from a plurality of fuel tanks, and returning the recovered fuel to the respective fuel tanks, comprising:

residual amount detecting means for detecting residual amounts of fuel in the respective fuel tanks; and

fuel return distribution adjusting means for adjusting a distribution of fuel returning to the respective fuel tanks, in accordance with values detected by the residual amount detecting means, in such a manner that the residual amounts of fuel inside each of the fuel tanks are approximately equal.

8. (Previously Presented) The fuel return device for the internal combustion engine according to claim 7, wherein the fuel return distribution adjusting means comprises: a flow rate control valve for adjusting a distribution of flow rate of the fuel returning to the respective fuel tanks; and control means for controlling the flow rate control valve in accordance with values detected by the residual amount detecting means.

9. (Previously Presented) The fuel return device for the internal combustion engine according to claim 8, wherein the control means calculates the difference between the residual amounts of fuel in the respective fuel tanks on the basis of the values detected by the residual amount detecting means, and controls the flow rate control valve in such a manner that this difference is eliminated.

10. (Previously Presented) The fuel return device for the internal combustion engine according to claim 7, wherein two fuel tanks are provided, and a first return passage for recovering surplus fuel, and two second return passages branching respectively from the downstream end of the first return passage and connecting respectively to the two fuel tanks, are provided; and

the fuel return distribution adjusting means comprises: a three-way electromagnetic valve provided at a connecting section of the first return passage and the second return passages; and control means for controlling the three-way electromagnetic valve in accordance with the values detected by the residual amount detecting means.

11. (Previously Presented) The fuel return device for the internal combustion engine according to claim 10, wherein the three-way electromagnetic valve comprises one inlet connected to the first return passage and two outlets respectively connected to the two second return passages; and

the control means calculates a difference between the residual amounts of fuel in the two fuel tanks on the basis of the values detected by the residual amount detecting means and adjusts an opening ratio between two outlets of the three-way electromagnetic valve in such a manner that this difference is eliminated.

12. (Previously Presented) The fuel return device for the internal combustion engine according to claim 7, wherein the two fuel tanks are provided, and a first return passage for recovering surplus fuel, and two second return passages branching respectively from a downstream end of the first return passage and connecting respectively to the two fuel tanks, are provided; and

the fuel return distribution adjusting means comprises[[:] a flow rate control valve interposed in one of the second return passages; control means for controlling the flow rate control valve in accordance with the values detected by the residual amount detecting means; and flow rate restricting means interposed in the other of the second return passages.

13. (Previously Presented) The fuel return device according to claim 12, wherein the flow rate control valve consists of a two-way electromagnetic valve and the flow rate restricting means consists of a diaphragm.

14. (Previously Presented) The fuel return device according to claim 13, wherein the flow rate control means consists of a variable throttle valve.

15. (Previously Presented) The fuel return device according to claim 7, wherein the residual amount detecting means consists of a floating type level gauge.

16. (Previously Presented) The fuel return device for the internal combustion engine according to claim 7, wherein the internal combustion engine comprises a common rail for accumulating pressurized fuel that is to be injected; each of the fuel tanks respectively comprises a fuel pressure feed pump; and at least one pressure adjusting pump capable of adjusting the output pressure is interposed between the fuel pressure feed pumps and the common rail;

the fuel discharged from the common rail and the fuel discharged from the pressure adjusting pump being returned to the fuel tanks.

17. (Previously Presented) The fuel return device for the internal combustion engine according to claim 7, wherein the fuel has the property of assuming a gaseous form at normal temperature and atmospheric pressure, and assuming a liquid form when pressurized to a pressure above atmospheric pressure when being used.

18. (Currently Amended) The fuel return device for the internal combustion engine according to claim [[1]]Z, wherein the fuel is dimethyl ether.

19. (Previously Presented) A fuel return method for an internal combustion engine for recovering surplus fuel supplied to the internal combustion engine simultaneously from a plurality of fuel tanks, and returning recovered fuel to the respective fuel tanks; comprising the steps of:

- detecting residual amounts of fuel in the respective fuel tanks;
- calculating the difference between the residual amounts of fuel in the respective fuel tanks, on the basis of detected values for the residual amounts; and
- making the residual amounts of fuel in the respective fuel tanks equal by adjusting a distribution of fuel returning to the respective fuel tanks, in accordance with the difference.